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JEWISH ESCHATOLOGY AND THE TEACHING OF JESUS

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Jewish eschatology has been a stumbling-block to the Aryan mind ever since Paul first preached the gospel to the Greeks. It was not acceptable to Sadducean conservatism even in its own home. Its fundamental tenet was the doctrine of a return of the dead from the underworld to the surface of the earth, a doctrine consonant neither with the world-wide popular conceptions of antiquity concerning the realm of shades, and the phantom, ghostly nature of its pitiable denizens, nor with the philosophic ideas of a natural and inalienable immortality of the soul, as an indissoluble monad, current since Plato's day. First in the dark days of the bitter persecution of Antiochus, the writer of "Daniel," pioneer of the great school of apocalyptists, translates Ezekiel's symbolism of restored *national* life in the "vision of the valley of dry bones" into individual and actual return out of the dust of the sepulchre for "many" of the dead. Martyred heroes of the Maccabean revolt will come out from their graves shining "as the brightness of the firmament." In company with "the wise" and those "that turn many to righteousness" they will enjoy "everlasting life" in the "kingdom that shall not pass away" which is to be given to Israel in the person of "the Son of Man," or of "Michael the great prince." "Many" renegades and betrayers of the law will also return "to everlasting shame and contempt." Such is the Jewish doctrine of "other-worldliness" at its first appearance. How far the great apocalyptist of Daniel was affected by Babylonian and Persian conceptions in his reaction against Hellenism is a question for the students of comparative religion. At all events with Daniel Judaism undergoes a great transformation. The Pharisees, repudiating the worldly ideals of the Sadducean hierocracy, those mere sycophants of the degenerate dynasty of the Hasmonaeans, carry the sympathies of Israel as a whole with them in transferring

all the messianic hopes to a transcendental, miraculous "world to come," to be achieved only by divine intervention. Henceforth Zealot nationalism and Sadducean conservatism become secondary; the main line of development of Israel's religious ideal is Pharisean and transcendental: the duty of every Israelite is obedience to the written law, his destiny is "a share in the world to come," given by the miraculous power of God as a reward for this obedience.

No wonder this fundamentally transcendental, non-natural, often wildly fantastic, belief awakened antipathy when carried over to the Greek world. Paul himself writes to the Corinthian church remonstrating on the one side with Platonists who look for nothing better than "to be unclothed" of "this mortality," and who "say that there is no (bodily) resurrection from the dead," on the other with crudely Jewish ideas which conceive the same body that was "sown" returning, flesh and blood inheriting the kingdom of God. But Paul's letters show only the beginning of a conflict that lasts over a full century, occupying a leading place in the thought of the Johannine writer, of II Peter, of Ignatius and Polycarp, of Papias and Justin Martyr, of Nepos and Dionysius. At first the church was not even content with the enlightened and moderate resurrectionism of Paul. It refused to be satisfied with the idea that in the coming kingdom we are to be "clothed upon with a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," a "body of glory" in the likeness of the glory body of the risen Christ, into which the "body of our humiliation" is "metamorphosed," whether by a process of gradual transformation "from glory to glory," while we "reflect as mirrors the glory of the Lord," or "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump," when "we which are alive and remain" are "changed," to meet the Lord as he comes from heaven¹ to reign in the new Jerusalem. No; while Palestinian influence remained still dominant in the church the current orthodoxy was formulated: "I believe in the resurrection of the *flesh*" (τῆς σαρκός). Ignatius maintained on the authority of a non-canonical form of the story, Luke 24:36-43, that Jesus "was in the flesh even after the resurrection."² Polycarp denounced as Antichrist those who "deny that there is either (bodily) resurrection

¹ I Thess. 4:15-17; Phil. 3:20, 21.

² See the whole passage, Ign. *Ad Smyrn.* iii.

or judgment." Papias used and defended the "trustworthiness" of the Revelation of John and appealed to the authority of "the Elders" in support of the crudest Jewish representations of the fertility of the earth in the messianic age, and the abodes of the saints in the world to come. Justin appealed to the same Johannine writing, and denounced as pseudo-Christians those who instead of its predicted return from the underworld to dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem, held only that "when we die our souls are taken to heaven."³ Only in Rome and Alexandria in the latter part of the second century was the tide turned against Montanists and Chiliasts, as the fanatical apocalyptists of Asia were now called, through the stronger, saner reasoning of Gaius at Rome and Dionysius at Alexandria. Gaius even went so far as to reject the entire Johannine canon of Proclus, his Phrygian opponent, Gospel, Epistles and Revelation of John. Dionysius more cautiously rejected only Revelation; but the reaction which ensued against chiliasm almost cost this writing its position in the canon. It was saved to use in only a portion of the churches, and then only by dint of a strained allegorical interpretation.

Jewish eschatology, resting on the phantasmagoria of Daniel and the apocalypses, was thus compelled in about 200 A. D. to purchase at the cost of allegorization even a subordinate place in the church alongside the triumphant Greek doctrine once anathematized, "that when we die our souls are taken to heaven." In modern times even its secondary position is disputed. Our evolutionary conceptions clash with the catastrophic idea of a transcendental kingdom of God miraculously substituted for a wicked world swept by angelic power into the lake of fire and brimstone. The once dominant apocalyptic idea of the apostolic age, with its anticipations of an impending "end of the world," and appearance on the clouds of the world-judge, is to the modern mind a delusion born of Jewish religious reaction against tyranny and persecution. But more significant than all else of change, we find ourselves confronted with an attack upon the apocalyptic idea in its last stronghold, the personal authority of Jesus.

None, of course, are so foolish as to deny that Jesus shared in the current doctrine of the Day of Judgment, nor that he urged his hearers

³ *Dial.* lxxx.

to repentance in view of many indications that the long-suffering of God was not to be expected to endure beyond a brief limit. This had been the essence of the message of John the Baptist, whom Jesus revered as "greater than a prophet," yes, as fulfilling in his person and work the promise of the coming of Elijah in the last days, to effect a great repentance in Israel, that the Day of Jehovah might prove a blessing to them and not a curse. Jesus saw confirmation of this promise in the person and work of John. He saw confirmation of the threat of coming judgment in "the signs of the times," partly in evidences of the impending clash with Rome which Zealot fanaticism was doing its best to bring about;⁴ partly in the bigoted opposition of scribes and Pharisees to God's message; partly in the turning of the publicans and sinners to John and to himself.⁵ Hence he reiterated the appeal of the "voice crying in the wilderness" concerning the axe laid at the root of the tree. He, too, looked for the messenger of judgment whose baptism of fire would burn up the chaff, while he gathered the wheat into his garner. Jesus not only seconded the Baptist's threat, he thought the conditions of the time such as to make the warning appropriate, "Agree with thine Adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him." He too thought of Israel as a tree which had but little time wherein to bring forth the expected fruit, or else be hewn down.⁶ He felt, at least after it became apparent that Israel as a whole would reject him, that the blood of all the prophets would be required at the hand of that same evil generation which in the message of John had had a greater matter than Jonah's cry, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed," and in his own a greater matter than the "wisdom" of Solomon. Even if we had not a host of sayings recording Jesus' warnings of impending doom upon Israel, we might be sure from his deep veneration for John the Baptist that he accepted and sympathized with the essence of the Baptist's message, Repent for the Judge is at hand.

There is also a figure which, however we may question Jesus' application of it to his own person, plays too large a part in the teachings attributed to him to be without some basis in his actual language,

⁴ Luke 12:54—13:9.

⁵ Matt. 11:20-24; 12:38-45; 21:22-43 and parallels.

⁶ Luke 12:54—13:9; cf. 3:9.

the Danielic figure of the "Son of Man." It has been questioned on philological grounds whether this title could have been employed in the Palestinian Aramaic of Jesus' time. If it could have meaning at all, it was by virtue of connotations derived from Dan. 7:9-14, in which the Son of Man⁷ occupies the central field in the scene of judgment. For John the Baptist the executioner of the divine judgment had been the Angel of the Covenant of Mal. 3:1-6; 4:1. So shortly after as the time when the teachings of Jesus received their first literary embodiment, the figure from Daniel has taken the place of that from Malachi. And our evangelists attribute the change to Jesus himself. We can hardly doubt that at least Jesus spoke of "the Day of the Son of Man" and that he looked forward to it as the day when the ceaseless prayer of God's elect, "Avenge me of mine adversary," would be answered. Repeatedly utterances of his are appealed to which indicate his conviction that this judgment of God would not be delayed beyond "this generation." Indeed, if the parties to the controversy, God's messengers on the one side, obdurate Israel on the other, were to be affected by it, to justify one or the other before the world, the judgment must needs come within that generation. Whether Jesus expected himself personally to return as this Son of Man is another question.

So much, then, for what Jesus received from the prophets that were before him, up to and including John. He looked for the Day of the Son of Man. He not only received, but indorsed and enhanced the doctrine. But even this does not constitute it his *message*. That must be distinctive of himself. It will not consist of that which he merely takes over from others, even if cordially indorsed. So far as the received doctrine is concerned we must find Jesus' distinctive message in his own characteristic application or modification of it. And even this modification must be in line with the great new teachings which originate with him, and which form the core and kernel of his thought. Somehow or other his followers, after having suffered a grievous disappointment of their hopes, were not all "stumbled in him." They were able to find a deeper sense in Jesus' teaching than

⁷ In the original the "throne of judgment" is filled by "one like unto a son of man," i. e., a being in human form, whether "Michael your prince," or an ideal figure in contrast with the beasts. But already, in *Enoch* (90 B.C.) the figure is taken as applying to a definite personality "*the* Son of Man."

hitherto, a sense transcending Jewish apocalypse. It is of course supposable that this was mere self-deception. The fourth evangelist, writing at a date when the expectation of a manifestation "to the world" was beginning to give place to a more mystical and Pauline expectation of "departing" and "being with Christ," a "being ever with the Lord," may have had nothing more than the Pauline mysticism to go upon in rewriting the doctrine of the second coming. But it may also be true that Jesus' own teaching was not dominated by the doctrines of Jewish apocalypse, though accepting them for their moral content, but rather dominated them. It may be possible even to determine which of these alternatives the true historical critic should follow, by a scrutiny of that which is in reality distinctive in his teaching.

If, indeed, we should take the ground occupied by many, that the title Son of Man was "Jesus' favorite self-designation" it would be difficult to escape the inference that the Danielic, the typical apocalyptic, conception of the kingdom was his dominant idea. Perhaps we should even be obliged logically with O. Holtzmann to answer his question, "Was Jesus an Ecstatic?" in the affirmative. But we have seen that even the linguistic possibility of Jesus' employment of the title is in doubt, while it is surely a very notable fact that the title is absolutely unknown to the New Testament outside the sphere of our four evangelists, who are not among its earliest writers and may all in this matter have been influenced by a single document. And there is a more fundamental objection than the linguistic. It lies in the central thought of Jesus regarding the nature of the kingdom and his own relation to it. The predominant, distinctive, and characteristic note of Jesus teaching is not the apocalyptic, but the ethico-religious. To put the matter in another light, the great antithesis for him is not the antithesis put by scribe and Pharisee, the now and the hereafter, obedience *versus* reward; although Jesus too often borrows this phraseology. The great antithesis for Jesus is qualitative rather than temporal. It is that between the outward and inward, the seeming *versus* the real, the material *versus* the spiritual. Hence his standard of human duty is not the written precept, but likeness in spirit to the All-merciful Father. Hence his yoke is at once easier than that of the scribes, and yet exacts a righteousness far exceeding theirs. Hence

also the destiny which is to follow "doing the will of the Father" in this sense is not limited to the future. It is assumed indeed to involve all the "reward" which the legalist hopes for in his apocalyptic resurrection kingdom—but this reward for Jesus is only "added." The real goal is "ye shall be sons and daughters of the Highest." It is eternal life. It consists not in getting but in being. The essence of the kingdom is the filial relation with God. And this distinction contains potentially, as Paul and the fourth evangelist perceive, a mystical doctrine of participation in the divine nature, "apprehension of the divine life," eternal life here and now, guaranteed for its future by a present relation to the "God of the living."

It is consonant with this cardinal distinction between the teaching of Jesus and that of the scribes and Pharisees, its only serious competitor, that his real title for himself, when forced to assume the attitude of leader, champion and representative of the "little ones," the despised "people of the land," is not "the Christ"—a title which if he ever tolerated it at all was tolerated only in a greatly accommodated sense—not "the Son of Man"—a title redolent of thoughts of future vengeance and reward—but, simply "the Son." This title, however, was not used in a theological, still less in an exclusive, but in a representative, sense. By it Jesus referred to himself as the plain man of the people who has come into that filial relation with "the Father" which is the ideal of the kingdom. The Fourth Gospel, after a generation of dallying by the church with the apocalyptic ideals of Judaism, reverts to the Pauline mysticism, and so with its title "the Son," and its doctrine of "eternal life," in a sense comes nearer, in spite of its theologizing, to Jesus' own teaching than the Synoptics with their Danielic view-point.⁸

The assertions just made as to the essential and distinctive features in the message of Jesus might seem to rest upon a priori preferences, since they undoubtedly agree far better with the modern religious consciousness than the oriental apocalyptic ideals of contemporary Pharisaism. But it is possible to show, if the distinction above made between the merely received and the strictly original in Jesus' mes-

⁸ On this subject of Jesus' messianic self-consciousness see my article, "Jesus the Son of God" in the *Harvard Theological Review* (July, 1909), interpreting the so-called "Johannine passage," Matt. 11:25-27 = Luke 10:21, 22.

sage be observed, that in this contention we are doing no more than simple historical justice to his pure and transcendent religious genius, his doctrine of inwardness.

In the matter of careful and minute analysis and comparison of the records we have great occasion for gratitude to Dr. Sharman, of The University of Chicago. His recent book on *The Teaching of Jesus about the Future*⁹ goes a long way toward showing first of all how Jesus' teaching, even while indorsing that of the Baptist in its religious content, expressly and repeatedly corrects and improves upon it by insisting upon the progressive, invisible, working of God through natural processes, as that which immediately concerns the hearer. The superlative commendation Jesus gives to John is accompanied by the qualification, "Howbeit, he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." John's cry of warning against the wrath to come is declared to be a greater matter than that of Jonah,¹⁰ for neglect of which "this generation" will be condemned in the judgment by the Ninevites. But in the same breath Jesus contrasts his own message of glad tidings with the lugubrious notes of John, as a "wisdom" of God, a greater matter than Solomon's. Thus while the Baptist's preaching of judgment is not set aside, but rather indorsed, it is distinctly *subordinated*. What primarily concerns the hearer is the "wisdom" of God, understood as in the Wisdom literature throughout, of the agency of the redeeming love of the Father in heaven. This belongs to the now and here. The judgment is for the unknown future.

When we take up the parables of the kingdom, it is precisely the same note which is struck over and over again. The parables of the Tares and of the Net full of Fishes are pendants. Both reassert indeed the doctrine of retribution, and assume that *when the time is fully ripe*, the harvest of God will be reaped, the separation of good and

⁹ The University of Chicago Press, April, 1909.

¹⁰ Not Jesus' message. In the reply to the demand for a sign, Matt. 12:38-42 = Luke 11:29-32, Jesus administers a *double* rebuke. That generation would have *neither* John's preaching nor his, *neither* wailing nor piping (cf. Matt. 11:16-19 = Luke 7:31-35; and Matt. 21:25-32 = Luke 7:30). The reference, accordingly, in the "sign of Jonah" is neither to the resurrection (Matt. 12:40) nor to the appearance of the Son of Man (Luke 11:30). It is, as clearly intimated in Matt. 21:25, 32, "the baptism of John." See Bacon, *Sermon on the Mount*, 1902, pp. 232 ff.

evil effected. But their *main teaching* is that God is not an impatient husbandman who cannot be satisfied with the slow processes of natural evolution. He does not intervene prematurely.¹¹ Both parables are directed *against* the tendencies of the apocalyptic eschatology. The parables of the Leaven, the Mustard-seed, the Sower, all repeat the same lesson in various forms. *Ultimately* there will be a "sending-forth of the sickle." *For the present* men must be satisfied with the quiet, unostentatious, yet sure working of God in natural processes. Surely this implies a profoundly qualified acceptance of Jewish eschatology.

The same standpoint is taken again and again in answer to the questions, When? or Where? Special warning is given against the prognosticators who think that the kingdom of God cometh with observation, and who seduce with their Lo, here, Lo, there. *Because the nature of the kingdom is inward* it is impossible to predict the time.¹² Again the apocalyptic imagery of the lightning, spreading its glow over the whole heaven at once, is indeed introduced and indorsed; but the application is aimed against the whole theory of the apocalyptists.¹³ Because "the kingdom (sovereignty) of God is within (or among) you" it can only come when the harvest of hearts redeemed is ripe. For this reason none but the Searcher of hearts can know the day. The desire to know it is answered by the direction to do your part to make the harvest ready; leave the question of when to "the Lord of the harvest."¹⁴

On the other hand this principle of "ripeness," usually employed by Jesus to counteract the apocalyptic impatience of current eschatology, can also be inverted. In a certain number of instances, nearly all recorded in Luke, Jesus himself so employs it. The parable of the Fig Tree appears in three different forms in Luke 13:6-9; Mark 11:12-14, 20 f., and 13:28-32. In the first two it has specific application to Israel, which has tried the patience of God to the utmost and can expect no more delay of judgment. Here we touch the delicate question whether Jesus really differentiated between the impending judgment of Israel, whereof he saw signs so manifest that he mar-

¹¹ With Mark 4:26-29 (Matt. 13:24-30 introduces a feature peculiar to this evangelist and not germane to the parable), cf. Jas. 5:7-11.

¹² Luke 17:20, 21.

¹³ Luke 17:22-37.

¹⁴ Acts 1:6-8.

veled how others could be blind to them,¹⁵ and the judgment of humanity. Certainly the tradition embodied by our Synoptic evangelists was not clear upon this point; nor could we expect it to be. We can only be certain that Jesus did apply his doctrine of "harvest" in both cases. The third application of the parable of the Fig Tree is general: the swelling of its fruit buds betokens the glad season of harvest. The world's day of redemption proclaims its approach in like manner and only so.¹⁶

Great effort has been made by those who have recorded the evangelic tradition to make it appear that Jesus gave specific prognostication of the events which culminated in the overthrow of the temple and downfall of Jewish nationality. A critical study of Sharman's analysis will show how large a discount we must make on this score from the present form of the tradition. The present writer holds that Sharman has stopped decidedly short of the truth because of an exaggerated conception of the primitiveness of Mark. The so-called "eschatological discourse" of Mark, chap. 13, transferred to our first and third gospels as Matt., chap. 24, and Luke, chap. 21, is simply an agglutination of sayings of Jesus on the basis of Danielic and Pauline apocalypse, with no real claim to represent a consecutive address of Jesus forecasting the future.¹⁷ The representation of the evangelist to that effect (vs. 23) contradicts the very essence of Jesus' teaching *against* the prognosticators. The Lukan source embodies, indeed, some characteristic sayings on the fate of the bloody city, murderess of the prophets, the "dry tree," the dead "carcass;" and these indicate that Jesus was not blind to the law of nature which prescribes elimination from the vital organism of the member which has become dead. But aside from his conviction that the dead carcass¹⁸ of the Jewish hierocracy could not continue to affront God and man beyond the limits of his own generation, we have no reason to suppose that Jesus made specific forecasts of the future. The one thing of which critical analysis of the whole record makes us sure is that Jesus observed that same wise restraint in this field which is

¹⁵ Luke 12:49—13:9.

¹⁶ Mark 13:28, 29.

¹⁷ For a discussion of "The Apocalyptic Chapter in the Synoptic Gospels" see Bacon, *Journ. of Bibl. Lit.*, 1909, Pt. I.

¹⁸ Luke 17:37; cf. 9:60; 11:50, 51; 23:27—31.

characteristic of him elsewhere, refusing to be made a prognosticator, insisting on limitation of his teaching to the broad principles of the divine retributive justice, and the need for immediate repentance. What he offers new is not another apocalypse more lurid than the last, with his own portrait in the midst as the Danielic Son of Man; it is a kingdom within, a filial relation of the least and last to the heavenly Father, and an eternal life which rests upon that sonship. He comes to bring in the "new covenant" of Jeremiah, the law written on men's hearts, the forgiveness of sin and iniquity, and the opportunity for all to know the Lord, from the least of them unto the greatest.¹⁹ In this knowledge of the Father he is, indeed, "the" Son; but only as the first born of many brethren. That is Jesus' new message. It was not dominated by, it rather took up into itself and reinterpreted, the message of John, the preacher of judgment. And in the new application of the old message of retribution the distinctive note of Jesus is always *against* the prognosticators, *against* the fanatical heralds of a *deus ex machina*, with their signs and portents, their Lo, here, Lo, there. He, too, looked, indeed, for the Day of the Son of Man, as it was written in Daniel the prophet. But his interpretation of apocalypse was marked by that same penetration to the spiritual essence which characterizes his interpretation of the law and the prophets. He interpreted the God of Scripture by the living God whom he saw in action round about. From Scripture he drew, in common with all his contemporaries, the doctrine of a Son of Man, coming "on the clouds," sitting on the "thrones of judgment." That was for the future. To the future he left the interpretation. From his own experience of life he drew the doctrine of the Son of God, a kingdom "within," whose essence is the filial relation of the least and last to God, the brotherly relation of each to all, an eternal life found in losing the self-centered life; and to the achievement of this kingdom he subjected every will, every ideal, because he believed in it as the sure, progressive, all-conquering will of God. This was his own message for the now and here.

¹⁹ Cf. Jer. 31:31-34.